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Contact: Christina Villacorte, [213-447-1277](tel:213-447-1277)

Email: cvillacorte@bos.lacounty.gov

Board of Supervisors Reforms How First Responders Treat Sexually Trafficked Children

The First Responder Protocol that guides Los Angeles County law enforcement and other agencies to treat children in the sex trade as victims of abuse and human trafficking, instead of criminal delinquents, may be expanded countywide.

Currently, only the Sheriff's Department's Compton and Century stations; the Los Angeles Police Department's 77th Area and Southeast Area stations; and the Long Beach Police Department have adopted the Protocol as permanent policy, following a successful pilot program.

On Tuesday, the Board of Supervisors approved a [motion by Supervisors Mark Ridley-Thomas and Don Knabe](#) to develop a plan for taking the Protocol into the County's unincorporated areas, as well as to cities patrolled by the Sheriff's Department. It also sought recommendations for enlisting the participation of cities that have their own police departments.

"Although federal law states that any individual under the age of 18 who is induced to perform a commercial sex act in exchange for anything of value is, by definition, a victim of sex trafficking, in the majority of jurisdictions within the County, minors are still being arrested, detained, and charged with prostitution and related crimes," Supervisors Ridley-Thomas and Knabe said in their motion.

"There is a need to expand the Protocol Countywide," Supervisors Ridley-Thomas and Knabe added. "Aside from the obvious benefits of rescuing victims and connecting them to life-saving resources, early and frequent collaboration between law enforcement and victim service providers helps victims and

prosecutors. Victims who receive immediate and comprehensive assistance are more likely to help bring their traffickers to justice.”

Under the Protocol, law enforcement officers alert and summon representatives of the Departments of Children and Family Services DCFS, Probation, Mental Health, and Health Services to provide specialized services within 72 hours to minors identified as victims of sex trafficking. The law enforcement officers must also involve survivor advocacy groups to provide assistance.

During the yearlong pilot program that ended July 31 at the Sheriff’s Department’s Compton and Century stations and the Long Beach Police Department, 36 young people were identified as commercially sexually exploited children (CSEC) and connected to critical services, including psychological and medical screenings and housing placements.

Only two arrests were made for prostitution and related charges during the pilot program – down from 94 in the year preceding the Protocol’s implementation. The success prompted the agencies that piloted the Protocol to make it their permanent policy. LAPD’s 77th Area and Southeast Area stations followed suit.

Each year in the United States, more than 1,000 victims of child sex trafficking are arrested and charged with prostitution. Many of them experience torture and abuse at the hands of traffickers called pimps, and buyers called johns.

In October, [Supervisor Ridley-Thomas stood with child trafficking survivors and advocates](#), as well as lawmakers and law enforcers, in launching a national campaign called [No Such Thing](#) to end the use of the misleading term “child prostitute” and to crack down on pimps and johns.

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